SOME

# THOUGHTS

Concerning the

# ARGUMENT *à Priori*;

Occaſion'd by

## Mr. KNOWLES's DISCOURSE

Entitled the

## EXISTENCE and ATTRIBUTES of GOD Not demonſtrable *à Priori*.

WITH

REMARKS upon the Authority of Received Opinions, and the Common Prejudice in Favour of Antiquity.

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*LONDON:*

Printed for G. HAWKINS at *Milton*'s Head in *Fleet-ſtreet*: And ſold by M. COOPER at the *Globe* in *Pater-noſter Row*.

M DCC XLVIII.

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TO THE

# READER.

*THE Editor thinks himſelf obliged, in juſtice to the Author, to acknowledge, that the following papers were long ſince tranſmitted to him, and that it is his fault they were not ſooner communicated to the Public. If indeed they contained anſwers only to the Objections Mr.* Knowles *has been pleaſed to urge againſt the Argument* à priori, *it would be much eaſier to excuſe this delay for a time than the publication of them at all. But the Reader, if it is poſſible at this time to procure attention to Subjects of this ſort, will here find not only the uſual Objections removed, but ſee the Argument itſelf or Demonſtration for the Being and Attributes of God propoſed*

*to him in a ſtrong, clear, comprehenſive manner.*

*It is not to be expected that every man ſhould feel the force of this Argument:* " *It is capable of being underſtood by only* " *a few attentive minds; becauſe it is* " *of uſe only againſt learned and meta-* " *phyſical difficulties. And therefore it* " *muſt never be expected, that this ſhould* " *be made obvious to the generality of men,* " *any more than Aſtronomy or Mathema-* " *tics can be.*"

*If Dr.* Clarke, *the learned Author of this argument*—Haud ulli veterum virtute ſecundus, *had not contracted it into as ſmall a compaſs as was poſſible, and in his reaſoning purſued a method as nearly mathematical as the nature of his ſubject would allow, it had certainly been leſs obſcure than it is, more generally underſtood and received, and conſequently not ſo liable to the objections of ſome ingenious men, who ſeem not to have ſufficiently attended to the force and propriety of his Language.*

*I am perſuaded that almoſt all the Difficulties in that great man's* diſcourſe *ariſe, not from any defect in the argument itſelf, but our*

*ignorance of the terms he employs in it. His deſigned brevity would not permit him to define and explain each uncommon expreſſion. As he wrote only to Mathematical and Metaphyſical Readers, he had reaſon to believe they would underſtand the artificial terms or language of their own ſciences. And yet, if I am not miſtaken, their objections to the argument are drawn from his uſing words in a ſenſe common to the beſt and moſt accurate writers upon thoſe Subjects. How often, for inſtance, have we been told, that an argument* à priori *muſt neceſſarily imply a cauſe, an* efficient *cauſe, prior to the firſt cauſe; as if Metaphyſicians had never adopted any other than* efficient *cauſes, or Mathematicians never diſcourſed of the* Cauſality *of* Mathematical Demonſtrations. *Certainly meaning by* cauſality, *not an* efficient, *but a* formal *cauſe, which, when underſtood, is ſufficient to obviate moſt objections to the proof* (à priori.) *Whether or no any Metaphyſical writer ever uſed the expreſſion of an argument* à priori, *in the ſame ſenſe with Dr.* Clarke, *may be ſeen by the following Definition* — Demonſtratio à priori dicitur, quia ſaltem in ordine noſtræ cognitionis principium demonſtratio-

nis apprehenditur tanquam aliquid antegrediens affectionem. Scheibleri Metaphyſ.—*And if the Reader will but give himſelf the trouble of looking into the ſixth Mathematical Lecture of* Barrow, *he will find that* " *Mathematical* neceſſary *Truths* " *are uſually demonſtrated* à priori, *tho'* " *nothing is prior to Truths eternally ne-* " *ceſſary* ; " *and that theſe have their* formal *cauſes. The meaning of which expreſſion is this, when from one eſſential property of any thing or being we can deduce other properties, that eſſential property, tho' not prior in order of nature to the reſt, is conſider'd as the cauſe of all that follow from it ; and as the properties of a thing conſtitute its form, that, from which all other properties are or may be deduced, is very properly called a* formal *cauſe. Thus, it is an eſſential property of a circle to have equal radij from the center to the circumference, and from this may be deduced every other property of that figure. This, ſays Dr.* Barrow, " *may be* " *called a* formal *cauſality, becauſe the* " *remaining affections do reſult from that* " *one property, which is firſt aſſumed as* " *from a form. Nor do I think there is* " *any*

" *any other cauſality in the nature of*
" *things, wherein a* neceſſary *conſequence*
" *can be* founded. *Logicians do indeed*
" *boaſt of I know not what kind of Demon-*
" *ſtrations from* external *cauſes either* effi-
" cient *or final; but without being able*
" *to ſhew one genuine example of any ſuch;*
" *nay, I imagine it impoſſible for them ſo*
" *to do.*" *I apprehend this will ſufficient-*
*ly prove the reality and preference of a* formal *cauſe, and explain what has, I think, tho' of great importance, been neglected in this controverſy,* viz. *the meaning of theſe terms, the* ground, *the* reaſon, permanent ground *or* reaſon, foundation, cauſe, formal cauſe *of God's Exiſtence. All theſe are words of equal import, tending to ſhew, that as the Exiſtence of God is* neceſſary, *ſo* Neceſſity *is the* formal cauſe *of His exiſtence; or* Neceſſity *is that attribute from whence other attributes may be deduced. It is the* Reaſon, *becauſe other attributes are rational conſequences from it. It is the* ground *or* foundation, *becauſe it is or may be firſt aſſumed as* prior *in our conception, or order of our Ideas, to the other attributes which are demonſtrated from it.*

*Let*

*Let us now hear no more of Dr.* Clarke's *ſuppoſing a cauſe prior to the firſt cauſe, or that the firſt cauſe is an effect, or that his Language is unphiloſophical or inexplicable. For it is the language of them who have wrote beſt upon the principles of Mathematical Science; and it is to the honour of the good and great Dr.* Clarke, *that he has been able to adapt the ſtricteſt terms of Mathematical Demonſtration to his proof of the Being and Attributes of God.*

*It will, I imagine, be objected, that allowing all I have ſaid about* formal *cauſes to be true, yet it does not appear that* Neceſſity *is the formal cauſe of God's exiſtence, or any of His attributes. To this I anſwer.*

*Firſt, If God is a* neceſſary-exiſting *being, he either exiſts becauſe he is* neceſſary, *or he is* neceſſary *becauſe he exiſts. The latter cannot be true, for then every thing that exiſts would be* neceſſary, *becauſe it exiſts; which is abſurd: Therefore He exiſts, becauſe He is* neceſſary; *that is, Neceſſity is the* Cauſe *or* Reaſon *of His exiſtence.*

*Secondly, Whatever is the* reaſon *that God exiſts at preſent, and will for ever continue, or cannot poſſibly ceaſe, to exiſt, that*

*that is and muſt be the* reaſon *why he originally did exiſt, the true* Cauſe *or* Reaſon *of his exiſtence, which can be no other than abſolute* Neceſſity.

*It has indeed been ſaid, that* Neceſſity *cannot be conſidered as an internal cauſe or ground of exiſtence, becauſe it is a* negative *Idea; but the abſurdity of ſuch an aſſertion will be manifeſt, when we conſider that* Neceſſity *is* poſitively *prædicated of the divine attributes, and that it is impoſſible to conceive any thing to be* poſitive *without it. We may as well ſuppoſe all to be* finite, *all* dependent, *all* unneceſſary, *as deny* Neceſſity *to be the moſt* poſitive *Idea we have.*

*To ſay no more, I think the controverſy, between the advocates for and againſt the Demonſtration of the Being and Attributes of God* à priori, *may be reduced to this ſhort iſſue: Whether abſolute* Neceſſity *is a mere* negative *Idea? And whether, againſt all* Mathematicians, *and the moſt diligent and acute inquirers into the* firſt principles *of* Science, *it can be proved, that a* formal *cauſe is no cauſe at all, but ſenſeleſs and unmeaning Jargon?*

*If*

*If theſe points can be clearly proved, the argument* à priori *muſt be given up as defenceleſs; but if falſe, as they certainly are, it will ſtand the Teſt of all future ages, to the Reproach and Confuſion of all pretended atheiſts, to the ſhame of all its ignorant opponents, and to the immortal honour of* † *him, whoſe great Services to the cauſe of Religion, of Virtue and of Learning will be remembered as long as Religion, Virtue, or Learning remain among us.*

† Dr. *Clarke.*

G. S.

SOME

# THE AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION.

I Never yet had the better opinion either of an Author or of any Cauſe, for boaſts of Victory, or complaints that Adverſaries will not be convinc'd. I remember Mr. *Leibnitz* complains of the Obſtinacy of Dr. *Clarke* in not ſeeing the concluſive Force of *his* arguments; which is enough to make every man of judgment ſick of ſuch complaints for the time to come. Of the ſame nature is the common Complaint of Sophiſtry and Ambiguity, when arguments happen to preſs ſomewhat too hard.

For my part, I ſhall have no mind to wonder nor complain if people are not convinc'd by my Productions. Let theſe ſpeak for themſelves. And, if I at all know myſelf, I ſhould be as willing in any controverſy to be convinc'd as to convince others.

As to the Subject I am now upon, nothing is plainer to me than that Mr. *Knowles* totally does not underſtand the Argument *à priori*; and that all his reaſonings againſt it ariſe from his own Miſtakes. I ſhall therefore ſtate that Argument in as clear and plain a manner as I can, that it may be at leaſt leſs unpleaſing and terrific to Mr. *Knowles* and his Friends. I ſhall likewiſe take notice of ſome of his reaſonings, tho' I am perſuaded that when once the Argument *à priori* is well underſtood, and fairly conſidered, all his objections are totally depriv'd of their force. Nor do I think many words needful to clear up this matter. I am ſenſible, on the contrary, that this kind of reaſoning is but clogg'd and encumber'd, obſcur'd and darken'd, by Prolixity, as perhaps every ſubject is; but a multiplicity of words in the preſent caſe is more inconvenient than in another way of reaſoning.

SOME

# SOME THOUGHTS Concerning the ARGUMENT *à priori*, &c.

## SECT. I.

### *What the Argument* à priori *is.*

WHAT we call the Argument *à priori*, is reaſoning from the neceſſity of the Exiſtence of God. Such reaſoning our Author will by no means allow. He treats it as both abſurd and impious; but I am ſtill of opinion that, upon the ſtricteſt examination, it will appear far from being either.

I can think of nothing more rational than to conceive of God that he cannot but be; and that it is a downright abſurdity and contradiction to ſuppoſe him not to be, as this is to ſuppoſe ſomething neceſſary to be and not to be at the ſame time. " When we are endeavour-

" ing to ſuppoſe there is *no Being* in the " Univerſe that exiſts Neceſſarily, we al- " ways find in our minds ſome Ideas, as " of *Infinity* and *Eternity*; which to re- " move, that is, to ſuppoſe there is no " Being, no Subſtance in the Univerſe, to " which theſe attributes are neceſſarily in- " herent, is a Contradiction in the very " Terms." *Dr.* Clarke *Dem. Prop.* 3.

And, tho' we are not *immediately* ſure of the Neceſſity of God's Exiſtence; but are brought to it by ſome rational deductions; the thing is juſt the ſame that it would be if we were able to ſee it plainly at once; it is not leſs evident or true than theſe axioms, that a part is leſs than the whole, or that a thing cannot be and not be at the ſame time.

When once we are led by proper reaſonings to the Being of a God, we are to conclude him exiſting of mere abſolute Neceſſity.

## SECT. II.

### *Nothing can exiſt without a Cauſe.*

BUT our Adverſaries inſiſt upon God's exiſting without a Cauſe; that is, if I at all underſtand the expreſſion, There is no reaſon to determine why he ſhould *be* rather

than why he ſhould not *be*; which, one would think, is what no man would dare to aſſert who allows there is a God.

Our Opponents will reaſon as we do upon the neceſſity of the world's being created; and ſay with us, If there be no Cauſe of the being of this or that, it cannot poſſibly *be*; but yet ſtrenuouſly affirm that God exiſts without any Cauſe or Reaſon at all; as if infinite Perfection could ariſe out of nothing, and without any Cauſe, when themſelves ſuppoſe an infinite Being neceſſary to the making and forming of the leaſt particle of duſt!

But, ſay they, we are come to the firſt Cauſe; and it is abſurd and a contradiction to enquire any further, or talk of a Cauſe *prior* to the firſt. He therefore muſt exiſt without Cauſe. But ſuppoſe any one ſhould take it in his head to ſay there is no firſt Cauſe, unleſs there be ſome rational account of his Exiſtence, ſome reaſon given why he ſhould rather *be* than not be. But, ſay our Reaſoners, the whole Creation leads us to this firſt Cauſe, ſince there is no accounting for any thing without having recourſe in the end to him. But what if this ſhould be call'd Begging the queſtion; and it ſhould be replied that it

is

is eaſier to ſuppoſe things leſs perfect produc'd by Chance or by nothing at all, than to believe a Being infinitely perfect exiſting when there is no Reaſon why he ſhould exiſt? How are we to anſwer ſuch troubleſome inquirers as would be *abſurd* and *impious* enough to aſk a reaſon for what we aſſert; and will not believe there is a God 'till they know why it ought to be believ'd?

I own we may rationally give our aſſent to the being of a God without inquiring very minutely into the Cauſe of his Exiſtence. But then I think nothing can be more abſurd than to ſay he exiſts without cauſe. Nor can I conceive why any part of the world, or the whole of it, may not as fairly be ſaid to *be* without any cauſe, as the great Creator. If there is nothing at all to determine his *Being* rather than his not *Being*, is it conſiſtent with the Principles of Philoſophy and Reaſon to aſſert that he is?

SECT.

## SECT. III.

*The Difficulty of conceiving an* internal *Cauſe the principal Objection to what Dr.* Clarke *maintains.*

BUT we are terrified with ſtrange abſurdities and impieties conſequent upon ſuppoſing there muſt be a Cauſe of God's Exiſtence. It is, it ſeems, denying him to be the firſt Cauſe; it is ſuppoſing him dependent, and ſomething elſe to be *prior* to him. But why ſo? why, e'en becauſe we ſee that the cauſe is prior to the effect, and the effect dependent upon the cauſe. And again, the effect is leſs perfect than the cauſe. And therefore to ſay there is a Cauſe of God's Exiſtence is, ſay our Opponents, to ſay there is ſomething more perfect than God.

I am not at all aware of theſe dreadful conſequences of aſſerting there muſt be ſome Cauſe or Reaſon of God's Exiſtence. If indeed I underſtood by a Cauſe what Mr. *Knowles* underſtands by it, namely, that it is neceſſarily ſomething *prior* and *ſuperior* to the effect, I muſt grant what he urges as conſequent upon ſuppoſing God to have a Cauſe of his Being. But as I think there

is

is ſuch a thing as an *internal* Cauſe, widely differing from, and infinitely ſuperior to the Cauſes we are generally converſant with, I am in no kind of fright or terror about the conſequences of maintaining that there muſt be a Cauſe of God's Exiſtence, or a Reaſon why he ſhould *be* rather than not *be*. But this, it ſeems, is a chimerical neceſſity, and what our Author do's not pretend to underſtand. And therefore it can be no affront to him to ſuppoſe he does not underſtand it. It is agreeing with him, and aſſenting to what he ſays. But why ſhould this Neceſſity, which Dr. *Clarke* calls an internal Cauſe, be ſuch a Chimera, be thought ſo unintelligible? The reaſon to me ſeems plainly this, that men have ſo confin'd their thoughts to the common courſe of cauſes and effects, that they cannot eaſily believe any thing to have a cauſe very unlike what they have obſerved, and what is commonly ſeen and known. But is the concluſion fair from a thing's being uncommon, that it is impoſſible, abſurd, and a Chimera? If ſo, ignorant perſons muſt have a right to contradict all doctrines and opinions beyond their view, and out of the common road of their enquiries; and explode ſuch doctrines as whimſical or abſurd,

abſurd. And indeed they commonly do ſo. But I do not find their authority regarded by perſons of ſuperior underſtanding and judgment.

And methinks 'tis hard to ſay it is impoſſible there ſhould be a cauſe or reaſon of a very different nature from thoſe which common experience will furniſh us with.

Indeed we are reduc'd to this Dilemma, either to allow that ſomething muſt exiſt from mere Neceſſity as a Cauſe of it's Exiſtence, or that ſomething muſt exiſt without any Cauſe or Reaſon at all; that is, without any thing to determine that it ſhould *be* rather than not *be*. Our adverſaries have choſen to aſſert the latter; which to me ſeems a downright Contradiction. To ſay a thing exiſts; and at the ſame time to ſay there is no Reaſon why it ſhould exiſt; ſeems to be talking at random, and without the leaſt appearance of Reaſon.

But ſuppoſe this abſolute Neceſſity, which is ſaid to be the Cauſe and Foundation of God's Exiſtence, to be a mere Conjecture or Imagination, or, if you pleaſe, a Chimera; yet Mr. *Knowles* cannot fairly charge Dr. *Clarke* and his Followers with ſaying there is ſomething prior to the firſt Cauſe, and

ſuperior to the Supreme Being, becauſe they maintain that Neceſſity is an *internal* Cauſe, and not any thing without or ſeparate from the Being of God. And from this one Conſideration moſt of Mr. *Knowles*'s Objections and Reaſonings fall to the Ground. And inſtead of ſaying we deſtroy the Independency of God, and ſet up ſomething above him, *&c.* he ſhould only tell us we are ſaying we know not what, and imagining ſomething which we cannot make intelligible. Whether this be truly the caſe or not, the Reader is to judge. But I can hardly think it follows that becauſe this or that perſon does not underſtand a particular thing, therefore no one underſtands it.

And, after all, where is the great Difficulty of conceiving God to exiſt of mere abſolute Neceſſity, ſo that it would be an abſurdity and a contradiction to ſuppoſe him not to be?

To criticiſe here upon the word Neceſſity, either from the Fathers or any other Writers, as Dr. *Waterland* and Mr. *Knowles* have done, [Vide Mr. *Knowles*, p. 9, 10.] is nothing at all to the purpoſe. Let Mr. *Knowles* or any one elſe help us to a better word, and we will thankfully make uſe of it.

If

If the idea of any thing ſo forces itſelf upon our minds that whilſt we are endeavouring to ſuppoſe there is nothing in itſelf neceſſary, nothing but what might poſſibly not be, we are oblig'd to ſuppoſe this thing is, and can by no means free ourſelves from the ſuppoſition of it's being; what are we to ſay of this, be it what it will, but that it is abſolutely neceſſary, and that it is a contradiction to ſuppoſe it not to be, ſince we find it is doing a ſort of violence to our minds and common ſenſe to ſuppoſe there is no ſuch thing? Dr. *Clarke* has very fairly ſtated, and, I think clearly illuſtrated this point, in the words cited, *Sect.* 1. " When we are " endeavouring," ſays he, " to ſuppoſe " there is *no Being* in the Univerſe that ex- " iſts neceſſarily; we always find in our " Minds ſome Ideas, as of *Infinity* and *Eter-* " *nity*; which to remove, that is, to ſup- " poſe that there is no Being, no Subſtance " in the Univerſe, to which theſe Attributes " are neceſſarily inherent, is a Contradiction " in the very Terms." For, adds he, " At- " tributes exiſt only by the Exiſtence of the " Subſtance to which they belong. Now " He that can ſuppoſe Eternity and Immen- " ſity (and conſequently the Subſtance by

" whoſe Exiſtence theſe Attributes exiſt)
" removed out of the Univerſe; may, if he
" pleaſe, as eaſily remove the Relation of
" Equality between twice two and four."

I would have Mr. *Knowles* endeavour to ſuppoſe there is no ſuch thing as either Space or Diſtance, or Time or Duration, or to ſet ſome limits in his mind to the former or the latter. Let him try the Succeſs of ſuch an Endeavour; and whether he will not find it abſolutely neceſſary to ſuppoſe both infinite Space and infinite Duration. And if ſo, let him aſk himſelf why it is neceſſary to ſuppoſe theſe; and then perhaps he will not think abſolute Neceſſity ſo mere a Chimera as he thinks it at preſent.

But what if we are told that Space and Duration are mere Ideas, and nothing real; that is, we imagine ſuch things without any foundation in nature and reaſon? In the firſt place, the imagination of theſe things, if it be ſuch, is univerſal. And, what is very extraordinary, we can imagine and think of nothing without ſuppoſing theſe. It is utterly unaccountable that all mankind ſhould fall into a particular whim, not at all ſupported by reaſon; and think it neceſſary that every thing they ſee ſhould be ſomewhere and at ſome time,

time, tho' there is no ſuch thing as either place or time, but in the groundleſs imagination and fancy of the whole world. Who is there that does not at ſome time or other *meaſure* both time and ſpace; that is according to our Adverſaries, meaſure nothing, do what cannot be done.

Now if infinite Space and Duration be not ſubſtances, (and I know not who ſays they are) can they be the Attributes of any but the Infinite Supreme Being? And as theſe are neceſſary to be ſuppos'd, neceſſary in every ſuppoſition, may not we fairly conclude that God is ſo? And is not this better, and more rational, and more pious, than to ſay he exiſts without cauſe, or, he is, tho' there is no reaſon why he ſhould be; or to make hard ſhifts to perſuade ourſelves that Contradictions and Inconſiſtencies are true, that a thing may *be*, and yet be no where, or never be, (which muſt be true if there be no time nor ſpace) or that what we cannot but ſuppoſe to *be*, is juſt nothing at all?

I cannot forbear thinking that they are driven hard who find or think it neceſſary to have recourſe to ſuch aſſertions. And if any Abſurdity like theſe was conſequent upon affirming that God neceſſarily exiſts, I

ſhould not be very fond of diſputing againſt Atheiſm.

## SECT. IV.

### *There may be ſuch a thing as an Eternal Effect.*

THERE is another thing that puzzles Mr. *Knowles* and his Friends, namely the ſuppoſition of an eternal Effect; which they would needs have to be a downright Contradiction. But why ſo? Can any other Reaſon be thought of but that we commonly find cauſes preceding Effects in point of time. And whether this be a ſufficient Reaſon or not, let any one judge. If it be, the Eaſtern Prince was in the right, who diſcarded the Miſſionary for affirming that in his Country water was every winter hardened into a ſolid ſubſtance; and that Fairs and Markets were ſometimes kept upon it. This the Prince look'd upon as a thing abſolutely impoſſible: but why? E'en becauſe it was not ſo in his part of the world. How good a reaſon that was, we *Europeans* are plainly ſenſible. And it may be worth our while to conſider whether the reaſoning be at all better from our common obſervation of cauſes and effects, to prove there can be

be no ſuch thing as an eternal effect; or whether we do not in this caſe reaſon exactly like the Eaſtern Monarch.

We are uſed to obſerve the *beginnings* of things. And it is out of our common way of thinking to conceive what has no beginning. Yet we are oblig'd to allow ſomething to be without a beginning. But many of us ſeem as ſparing in this reſpect as they can be, and willing to grant as little as poſſible to eternal Duration, or indeed any thing beyond what they are us'd to, and their ſenſes and experience ſhew them.

I cannot conceive why it ſhould be more abſurd and unreaſonable to ſuppoſe an eternal cauſe producing an eternal effect without any beginning, than to ſuppoſe any effect or any created and dependent being to be everlaſting. Why ſhould it be impoſſible for an effect to have no beginning, and yet poſſible for an effect to have no end? The latter we are apt readily to grant, however we boggle at the former.

There is a difficulty, I own, in conceiving what is out of the road of our experience and cuſtomary way of thinking. And this, I believe, makes the whole difference between ſuppoſing an effect without a beginning,

ning, and an effect without end. We are continually told that we ſhall never ceaſe to be: And therefore it is eaſy and familiar to us to think ſo. But as it is ſomewhat uncommon, and what ſeldom takes place, for us to enquire at all whether an effect can be ſtrictly ſpeaking eternal or not, and the things we are converſant with have manifeſtly a beginning, we are apt to ſtart at the ſuppoſition, and reject it as a downright Impoſſibility. Yet I think it may be thus *demonſtrated* to be poſſible. There never was a time or any portion of duration when God could not have brought ſomething into being, or caus'd That to *be* which otherwiſe would not have been. And can we ſay there was a time when he could not have exerted the Power we allow him to be poſſeſs'd of? This would be to ſay he has and he has not this Power, he can and he cannot do this or that. And this abſurdity we muſt be reduc'd to, if we ſay an effect cannot be eternal and without beginning unleſs we deny God to be without beginning, or ſay there was a time when he had not the Power of creating. This Power he confeſſedly had from all Eternity. Therefore he may, for ought we know, have exerted it from all Eterniy,

ſince

ſince there never was a time when he could not have exerted it. But this, ſay our Adverſaries, contradicts the very notion and idea of creation or effect. A creature, ſay they, is a thing caus'd to be; and therefore was not 'till the Power of Creation was exerted, and therefore had a beginning. And every effect follows the operation of it's cauſe, and is therefore produc'd in time, and cannot be eternal. This reaſoning proceeds from nothing but falſe definitions grounded upon common prejudice. A creature is a thing brought into being, and what once was not. An effect is ſomething produc'd by a cauſe, and is therefore, in point of time, after the cauſe. Theſe things are generally true, and almoſt univerſally taken for granted. And when once a definition takes place, which confines our ideas, it is hard to enlarge them, and carry them beyond the limits of ſuch definition. But what if I ſhould ſay a creature is a being caus'd by another being, or a being that would not have exiſted but for the Power and Will of the Creator, and an effect is a thing produc'd by ſome Cauſe, without ſaying any thing of time or duration, or determining whether the creature or the effect had a beginning or not? Would

not theſe definitions entirely anſwer the purpoſe, and ſignify ſufficiently what is meant by a creature and an effect? If it be inſiſted upon, that we expreſs a *beginning* in our definition either of one or the other, this is begging the queſtion. It is eaſy to put our own opinion into a definition, and then to inſiſt upon it as part of that definition. But ſuch ſhifts will never do credit to any cauſe. The definitions I have given are, I think, ſufficient to expreſs what is or ought to be meant by a creature and an effect: Nor do I ſee any neceſſity for limiting the Power of God to *time*, any more than to place; or for ſaying there was a time when he could not act, any more than there is any place where he cannot act.

And if we ſay that whatever he has caus'd to *be* muſt have had a beginning, we muſt affirm that there was duration without beginning, in which he *could not* have cauſed any thing to be; for, take what portion of time or duration you will, there was duration without beginning before it.

And that an effect may be coeval with its cauſe appears from the emanation of light from the ſun or any other luminous body. If then we ſuppoſe a cauſe eternal, we may

ſuppoſe an effect eternal. And if we allow there always was a Being of infinite Wiſdom and Power, we muſt, if we are at all conſiſtent with ourſelves, allow that Being could have acted, or have cauſed ſomething to have been, from all Eternity. Nor will the difficulty or impoſſibility of *conceiving* an eternal cauſe, or an eternal effect, ſtint the Power of the Almighty, or make it impoſſible for *him* to have done what we in effect own he could have done, when we own, that he is without beginning, and that his Power and Wiſdom are eternal and infinite; namely, to have caus'd ſomething from Eternity. It would be as fair and as juſt to ſay there is no ſuch thing as Eternity or Infinity, becauſe we fall ſhort in our ideas of theſe things, and are apt to think of bounds and limits, from being generally converſant with limited things; I ſay, it would be as juſt and reaſonable to deny there is any ſuch thing as Eternity or Infinity, for want of a full and adequate idea of theſe things, as it is to ſay, it is impoſſible for any thing to be caus'd or effected from Eternity, becauſe we cannot perfectly conceive how ſuch a thing can be. And are we able to conceive creation, or how any thing can be brought into Being,

or made to exiſt, which once did not exiſt? And is not this as difficult to conceive as the cauſing ſomething from all Eternity?

What has been caus'd, produc'd, or created from Eternity (if there be any ſuch thing) is as much dependent upon the Creator as any thing produc'd in time. And the Power and Wiſdom and Goodneſs of the ſupreme Being muſt appear at leaſt as much in ſuch a Production as in one which had a beginning; one would think much more, ſince the doing a thing, we can but juſt perceive to be poſſible, ſeems greater than the doing what appears eaſier and more familiar to our thought and imagination.

## SECT. V.

### *The Neceſſity by which God exiſts widely differs from Fatality.*

OUR Author ſeems to apprehend the Doctrine of Fate when we ſpeak of the neceſſary Exiſtence of God. But he may be ſoon deliver'd from his fear, by conſidering that we as much maintain the Freedom of God in willing and acting as he can do. Is it not one thing to ſay God cannot but be, and quite another to ſay he cannot but act in this or that particular manner?

But

But Mr. *Knowles* thinks the Author he immediately oppoſes (who ſeems to me from Mr. *Knowles*'s quotations, to have done Juſtice to the Argument *à priori)* Mr. *Knowles*, I ſay, thinks this Author makes God a neceſſary Agent, and that he ſtrangely contradicts himſelf, [*Knowles*, p. 79.] becauſe he ſays, " God is neceſſarily an *agent*," and that " *neceſſity*, as it is the *cauſe and foundation* " of his *nature* and *exiſtence*, muſt alſo be " the *ground* of his *agency*." He adds, "All " agency, eſſentially implying *ſelf-motion* " and activity, is *perfect*." "A ſtrange con- " tradiction this!" ſays Mr. *Knowles*, " that " the very eſſence of agency ſhould conſiſt " in perfect freedom, and yet be founded at " laſt on abſolute neceſſity." But if he had rightly underſtood the Author, he could not have made this objection. I think it moſt evident that this Author meant by God's being neceſſarily an *agent*, his having neceſſarily a *Power to act*, as is plainly expreſt in theſe words, " *Neceſſity*, as it is the *cauſe* " and *foundation* of his *nature* and exiſt- " ence, muſt alſo be the *ground* of his *agen-* " *cy*." Do's this mean that he acts *neceſſarily*, or ſo that he cannot but act in this or that manner? I could never have thought of

of putting this interpretation upon it. And if it does not mean ſo, Mr. *Knowles* has ſpent half a dozen pages to no purpoſe, in ſhewing the huge Inconſiſtency of Liberty and Neceſſity, one with the other.

## SECT. VI.

*That God is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, omnipreſent: And that this appears from his neceſſary Exiſtence.*

MR. *Knowles* thinks that God's *ſimple and uniform eſſence can have no reſpect either to time or place*, p. 6. that is he muſt be, and yet never be, and be no where. Now I think nothing can be a plainer and groſſer contradiction than this. But our Author is afraid, that *if* God's *Eſſence could have relation to this or that place, it would conſiſt of ſeparate parts*; *and*, ſays he, *if it conſiſted of ſeparate parts, it would be corporeal and extended.* And I find theſe two words *corporeal* and *extended* ſignify with him juſt the ſame thing, *p.* 65. But I cannot think the ſimplicity of the Eſſence of God at all hurt by his ſtrict omnipreſence; or that it follows from thence that God's Eſſence conſiſts of ſeparate parts, that it is

corporeal

corporeal or diviſible. The inſtances of ſpace and duration may fairly illuſtrate this matter. Nothing can be more ſimple and unmixt than the one or the other. And I hope I have ſaid enough, *Sect.* 3. to ſhew that theſe are not mere ideas, fancies and imaginations.

But we are to be confuted again by a Definition, and told that *extenſion (unleſs when it is applied to meer abſtract ideas, formed by our own minds, ſuch as* ſpace, time, *&c.* (he might as well have ſaid ſubſtance, body, or any thing elſe, for nothing can be more real than time and ſpace) *is uſually defined to be that, which has* partes extra partes, *to talk of the extenſion of God is to aſcribe a body and parts to him; (which yet the firſt* article *of our religion contradicts;) and to ſpeak of his* infinite extenſion, *is to imply, (as a learned expoſitor of the articles obſerves *) that he fills all places, and conſequently, leaves no room for the exiſtence of other ſubſtances,* p. 65.

By Extenſion I mean whatever is not a mathematical point, or has Length, Breadth and Thickneſs. And are our Adverſaries ſure that nothing but corporeal Subſtance is

* *Welchman* on the XXXIX Articles. *Art.* I. *Not.* 5.

thus

thus extended? Space is certainly ſo. Nor do I think it at all abſurd to ſuppoſe an immaterial Subſtance to exiſt where a material Subſtance exiſts. For I do not perceive that any thing excludes Matter from this or that place, or makes it impoſſible for a particular piece of Matter to exiſt here or there, but Matter. And, in my opinion, we may as fairly affirm that Space *leaves no room for the exiſtence* of Matter, as that any ſpiritual or immaterial Being excludes Matter.

And what may be ſaid of Matter in this reſpect may as well be ſaid likewiſe of any immaterial Subſtance compar'd with another immaterial Subſtance of a different nature; namely, that one does not exclude the other from any place or part of ſpace. For as Dr. *Clarke* obſerves *, Matter and Spirit *is no other Diviſion, than* Matter *and* not-matter, *juſt as if one ſhould divide the Species of animals into* Horſes *and* not Horſes. Unleſs Mr. *Knowles* and his Friends will undertake to give us a clear Idea of a Subſtance, they have no right to affirm, that a Subſtance of one kind excludes a Subſtance of another kind from any place. Pray what excludes Mat-

* Part of a Letter publiſhed at the end of his *Boyle's* Lectures.

ter

ter but Solidity, or that property by which Matter reſiſts the Touch, and is impenetrable by Matter? Now unleſs they will ſay a Spirit, or an immaterial Being, is ſolid, that is, it is Matter, they cannot juſtly urge this argument againſt us, that if God was omnipreſent, he would exclude Matter from the Univerſe. Nor can they without telling us plainly what a Subſtance is, and diſtinguſhing as plainly between one kind of Subſtance and another, ſhew that it is impoſſible for a ſubſtance of one kind to exiſt where a ſubſtance of another kind exiſts. They muſt therefore *by ſearching find out God*; they muſt *find out the Almighty unto perfection*; * they muſt be perfectly acquainted with his very Eſſence; in order to know that no other ſubſtance can exiſt where he exiſts. And is not it much more rational to ſuppoſe, that this infinitely pure and perfect Being can be excluded by no other being, than, for fear of a difficulty without the leaſt foundation, have recourſe to a downright abſurdity and contradiction, and aſſert what our minds can hardly, with all the pains we *can* take to prejudice them, give their aſſent to, name-

* *Job* xi. 7.

ly, that ſomething may be, and yet be no where, and never be. They that ſwallow this, need not at all ſtrain and boggle at the abſurdity of the old ſcholaſtic tenet, *Totum in toto, & totum in qualibet parte**.

" Whoever," ſays Mr. *Knowles*, " would " defend the infinity of God, muſt neceſ- " ſarily exclude the conſideration of time " and place, and muſt not conceive *eter-* " *nity*, as compoſed of repeated parts of " *duration*, nor *infinity* or immenſity as " made up of any number of *finite exten-* " *ſions*." p. 67. Pray what is he to think of Eternity or Infinity? any thing, or nothing? Is he to uſe the words without the leaſt meaning or ſignification? Is he to talk downright Jargon and Nonſenſe? This can anſwer no purpoſe at all.

What puzzles many in this caſe is the being us'd to bounds and limits, and the uſe of numbers, which ſignify ſomething finite and determin'd. " Abſolute infinity," our Author tells us, *p.* 66. " (ſuch as belongs " to God) will not admit of any parts or " degrees: for if it does not ſurmount " every addition of parts, it is not infi- " nity; and if it does ſurmount them, we

* Mr. *Knowles*, p. 66.

" can

" can never arrive at an adequate idea of " it." The difficulty here ſeems to be in the uſe of the word parts, which our Adverſaries think cannot but ſignify what either may be divided and ſeparated from one another, or what at leaſt bears ſome determinate Proportion to the thing to which they belong. I own the word, in the common uſe of it, ſignifies both. But does it follow that it muſt always ſignify either the one or the other, and is never us'd ſo as to exclude both? We do not always well diſtinguiſh between words and things. And when we are ſpeaking upon an uncommon ſubject, it is ſometimes neceſſary to uſe words in an uncommon ſignification. To have parts, when we ſpeak of matter, is to be diviſible, and to have ſuch parts as bear a particular proportion to the whole. But to have parts, when we ſpeak of Space or Duration, is to be capable of being partially conſidered, not actually, or even in thought, divided. And in this caſe whatever we think of, or meaſure out as a part, bears no proportion to the whole. And even matter itſelf has this puzzling property belonging to it, the being diviſible *ad infinitum*, as is plainly demonſtrated. Shall we ſay then

that matter does not conſiſt of the parts which we know do compoſe it; and contradict our ſenſe and reaſon, in order to ſhuffle off a difficulty we cannot get over? I think if this be neceſſary in one particular, it is in another; and the ſame ſhift we are willing to make to avoid the difficulty of conceiving Infinity in one inſtance, may ſerve us in every other inſtance of it. Let us e'en ſay then, that Matter has no parts, becauſe it is diviſible *ad infinitum*, as well as that Space and Duration have none, becauſe they are infinite. And what Infinite is there which cannot be partially conſider'd? Indeed what Infinite is there which is otherwiſe than partially and imperfectly thought of by us? I know no hurt in ſaying Duration and Space have Parts, if I do not mean ſeparable parts, or ſuch as neceſſarily ſet bounds and limits to the thing to which they belong.

And I think Dr. *Clarke*'s reaſoning concluſive from the neceſſary Exiſtence of God to prove his Omnipreſence. For I can imagine no Neceſſity for that Being to exiſt at all, which may, without an Abſurdity and a Contradiction, be ſuppos'd abſent at any time from any place; ſince it is as eaſy,

and

and as reaſonable to ſuppoſe ſuch a Being abſent from any other place, and therefore from all places. And this I believe every one cannot but be ſenſible of who conſiders what abſolute Neceſſity is, and endeavours to ſuppoſe any part of time or ſpace reduc'd to nothing.

## SECT. VII.

### *God is neceſſarily but one.*

MR. *Knowles* thinks he has utterly overturn'd Dr. *Clarke*'s reaſoning, from the Neceſſity of God's Exiſtence, to prove there is but one God. "If neceſſity," ſays he, "is able to produce diffe-"rent attributes, why not different beings "too?" * This is, I think, the beſt argument in his whole piece. But unluckily for it, it is anſwer'd in direct terms by Dr. *Clarke* himſelf, in part of a Letter publiſh'd at the end of his *Boyle's Lectures*. Theſe attributes are not different parts, but all belong to the one ſimple infinite Being: *Juſt as the Powers of* Hearing *and* Seeing *are not* Inequalities *or* Deformities *in the* Soul of

* P. 74.

Man;

Man; *but each of them, Powers of the* whole *Soul.*

I muſt here take notice of a ſtrange Miſtake of Mr. *Knowles*, in repreſenting Dr. *Clarke* as aſſerting, that "neceſſity is "the foundation of the divine ſubſtance "and of *moſt of its attributes*," but not all, becauſe "Dr. *Clarke* juſtly grants that "the divine wiſdom and intelligence can-"not be demonſtrated by his old argument, "as Mr. *Knowles* calls it, *Dem. Prop.* 8 *." But what if we cannot prove the Wiſdom of God *à priori?* Muſt there be no Cauſe of this Wiſdom? Indeed if there be no Reaſon why God ſhould be at all, there is no Reaſon why he ſhould be wiſe. But methinks, to ſay there *is* a Cauſe or Reaſon, and to ſay *we* are acquainted with this Cauſe or Reaſon, are two different Aſſertions. And if ſo, Dr. *Clarke* might ſafely ſay we cannot prove the Wiſdom of God from his neceſſary Exiſtence, without denying him to be *neceſſarily* wiſe.

Here is a ſtrange Confuſion of *Argument* and *Cauſe*. Dr. *Clarke* ſays you cannot take your Argument *à priori* for the Wiſdom or Intelligence of God. There-

* P. 74. Text and Note.

fore,

fore, ſays Mr. *Knowles*, the Doctor will not aſſert his Wiſdom and Intelligence to be founded upon abſolute Neceſſity. Pray, where is the Conſequence? I own I cannot ſee it, unleſs nothing can be true of which *we* are ignorant, which I preſume Mr. *Knowles* will hardly maintain.

Mr. *Knowles* cites the following paſſage from Dr. *Clarke*, " to ſuppoſe *two* (or more) " *different* natures, " exiſting *of themſelves*, " neceſſarily, and *independent* from each " other, implies this plain contradiction; " that each of them being independent " from the other, they may either of them " be ſuppoſed to exiſt alone, ſo that it " will be no contradiction to imagine the " other not to exiſt; and conſequently " neither of them will be neceſſarily exiſt- " ing. *Dem. Prop.* 7.—But," ſays our Author, " this, with ſubmiſſion to ſo great a " name, ſeems to be taking a falſe ſtep at " the firſt ſetting out: for ſince neceſſity " alone from its own nature does not hin- " der us from ſuppoſing two (or more) ne- " ceſſary exiſting beings, as we have ſeen " but juſt now *; and ſince, *ex hypotheſi*,

* See this confuted juſt now at the beginning of the Sect.

" they would both of them be eternal and " independent, they could neither of them " be imagined not to exiſt." *p.* 75, 76.

As for their being eternal and independent *ex hypotheſi*, this will only be denying us the liberty of endeavouring to make the Suppoſition. The queſtion is whether, if more than one neceſſary exiſtent Being be ſuppos'd, any one of them, as they are all ſuppos'd to be independent, may not be ſuppos'd to exiſt alone, ſo that the reſt, or of two the remaining one may be ſuppos'd not to exiſt. And if this be truly ſo, there can be but one neceſſarily exiſtent Being. Such a Being muſt be neceſſary in every ſuppoſition, like Space and Duration. Therefore if any thing can exiſt without a Being that is ſaid to be neceſſarily exiſting, that Being ſuppos'd to be neceſſarily exiſtent is not truly ſo.

" But," ſays Mr. *Knowles*, " the whole " of this miſtake has ariſen from explain- " ing neceſſity of exiſtence by the impoſ- " ſibility of non-exiſtence, that is (contra- " ry to all the rules of good reaſoning,) a " *poſitive* idea by a *negative* one." *p.* 76. Poor Dr. *Clarke!* that he ſhould at laſt be diſcover'd

diſcover'd to be ſo bad a reaſoner as to tranſgreſs at once *all the rules of good reaſoning*; and not have ſo kind a friend as Mr. *Knowles* in all his life-time to tell him that he did ſo! But how is this done? why, *by explaining neceſſity of exiſtence by the impoſſibility of non-exiſtence*; that is, by talking plain good ſenſe. And may I never conform to any *rules of reaſoning* contrary to this. I believe no one but Mr. *Knowles* ever thought ſuch an explanation contrary to any *rule of good reaſoning*. *I* own I am apt to diſtinguiſh between *explaining* and *reaſoning:* Perhaps with this Gentleman they may be juſt the ſame thing. What *neceſſity of exiſtence* is, but *the impoſſibility of non-exiſtence*, I do not know. It was treated before as a Chimera and ſomething unintelligible: And now we have Dr. *Clarke*'s ſenſe well expreſt, it is ſaid, I know not why, unleſs it be becauſe Mr. *Knowles* is reſolved to reject it, to be *contrary to all the rules of good reaſoning*. I would aſk, Is it a juſt and intelligible way of ſpeaking? Does it convey the idea intended? If ſo, what juſt *rules* can it violate?

Suppoſe Mr. *Knowles* ſhould be ſo unhappy as to explain *Infinity* by ſaying, it is that which has no Bounds or Limits, or explain Eternity by ſaying, it has no Beginning or End (as I preſume he would upon occaſion;) what would be the conſequence? Why, according to his own account, he would trangreſs *all the rules of good reaſoning*.

And this, it ſeems, is Dr. *Clarke*'s fundamental error, at leaſt in proving the Unity of God. "The whole of this miſ-"take," Mr. *Knowles* ſays, "has ariſen "from explaining neceſſity of exiſtence "by the impoſſibility of non-exiſtence." *p.* 76. And ſince this, which is call'd *the whole miſtake*, is found to be no miſtake at all, but moſt rational and juſt, we may reaſonably conclude the Argument *à priori* not ſo bad a thing, nor ſo evidently confuted, as Mr. *Knowles* thinks it; but rather pretty ſafe from his attacks, and in a fair way of ſtanding its ground, upon an impartial Examination.

I muſt not diſmiſs this Head without doing Mr. *Knowles* the Juſtice of ſetting down *the authority he has for his own prin-*

*principles.* And this I ſhall give you in his own words, *p.* 78. " If we next en-
" quire into the authority that we have
" for our own principles, we ſhall find
" that they ariſe from the received articles
" of our Chriſtian Faith: for that this
" doctrine of the unity is included in the
" firſt article of our creed, *I believe in*
" *God*, is apparent, not only becauſe the
" *Nicene* Council ſo expreſſed it by way
" of expoſition, but alſo, becauſe this Creed
" in the churches of the Eaſt, before the
" council of *Nice*, had that addition in it,
" *I believe in* ONE *God.* And that this
" unity was intended to be deduced from
" arguments *à poſteriori* only, is evident
" from the following words, *maker of*
" *heaven and earth:* whereby we under-
" ſtand the manner in which he has thus
" manifeſted himſelf to be the *one*, eter-
" nal, almighty God, *viz.* by the works
" of the creation. Several texts of ſcrip-
" ture alſo might eaſily be produced to
" the ſame purpoſe, but every one's own
" obſervation muſt render this needleſs."

I do not know what Mr. *Knowles* means by this expreſſion, *The authority that we have for our own principles*, unleſs he

means the foundation or reaſon upon which his principles are built.

I read this paſſage over and over again, that I might not miſunderſtand it. And it ſeems to me ſomewhat ſurprizing that a Proteſtant, as I ſuppoſe Mr. *Knowles* to be, ſhould give this as a Reaſon for his principles or opinion, that it is a *receiv'd* article or doctrine, or that it is contain'd in a Creed, whether ancient or modern. And for this to be done in a philoſophical debate is ſomething more extraordinary ſtill.

When we are reaſoning upon the Being and Attributes of God, we are ſuppos'd to diſcourſe ſo as to convince an impartial Unbeliever. And is this to be done by urging *the Authority* of *the received Articles of our Chriſtian Faith?* Will this be of any force at all with one that is to be convinc'd not only of Chriſtianity, but of natural Religion?

But Mr. *Knowles* is now reaſoning againſt Chriſtians. And this *Authority* may be, in his opinion, properly urg'd to them. But, pray, what is the Foundation of a Chriſtian's Belief? What *Authority* is he to rely upon? We are apt to ſay, Divine *Authority*. And I believe we are not miſ-

taken

taken when we ſay ſo. And if this be true, how is a doctrine's being *receiv'd*, an Evidence in its favour? Or by whom muſt it be *receiv'd* to give it the proper Stamp and Mark of Truth or Divine Original? Our Enquiry, in my opinion, ſhould rather be from whence it came at firſt, and how it appears to be deliver'd from Heaven, than what Reception it has met with upon earth. We know our Bleſſed Lord's Inſtructions were generally *rejected* when he deliver'd them himſelf, notwithſtanding the many wonderful things he did in Confirmation of his Divine Miſſion, and tho' That was evidenc'd by many Prophecies of the old Teſtament plainly fulfill'd in him.

And we Proteſtants think the Generality of Chriſtians have *receiv'd* abſurd and monſtrous Doctrines for above a thouſand years together.

When was there an Age in which there were not ſome great Errors in Religion, even amongſt thoſe who have had the beſt Inſtructions in the world? Was it not ſo amongſt the ancient *Jews?* And did not many of our Bleſſed Lord's Diſciples and Followers greatly miſunderſtand him? And did

did not St. *Paul* complain of many great Errors amongſt Chriſtians in his time, as well as foretel many to come? How then can the bare antiquity of an opinion or doctrine, or it's being *receiv'd*, be an evidence of the Truth of it? We Proteſtants call the Scripture our only Rule of Faith: We are therefore utterly inconſiſtent with ourſelves if we admit of another.

But we are told, that they who liv'd neareſt to the times of our Bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles were moſt likely to underſtand their meaning; and therefore we are to pay a Deference to Chriſtian Antiquity, and ſuffer it to have ſome weight with us in interpreting Scripture.

Now I would know what ſtreſs they who urge this would lay upon the mere opinions of ancient Chriſtians? Do they ſuppoſe them to have been divinely inſpir'd? I do not find this generally aſſerted of any writings ſince thoſe contain'd in the new Teſtament. And as for any particular Information they receiv'd, which may be helpful in interpreting Scripture, we are to collect That as well as we can from their Writings. And we find theſe perſons differing from one another in many things. Nor

Nor do I think the mere opinion of a man that liv'd in the ſecond Century of much, if at all greater force, in point of Evidence, than that of one who has liv'd ſince that time. Indeed we are to conſider and compare the Character and the Judgment of two different perſons, in order to determine which of them is the more likely to be in the right. And when we have got ſo far, we have but little Evidence from thence for the Truth of his opinion, or which of the two, may be the more likely to think juſtly; and I think we have none at all where any other Evidence may be had, for I know no other kind of Evidence that is not ſtronger than this.

Some ſtrange Miſtakes may eaſily be ſhewn in the opinions of the moſt ancient Chriſtians: Some, as I have obſerv'd, in the times of Chriſt himſelf and his Apoſtles.

*He* muſt have but a poor chance to be in the right who would determine any matter of doubt by majority of Votes.

*That* the *Unity* of God, ſays our Author, *was intended to be deduced from arguments* à poſteriori *only, is evident from the following words*, maker of heaven and earth: *whereby we underſtand the manner in which he*

*he has thus manifeſted himſelf to be the* one, *eternal, almighty God*, viz. *by the works of the creation.*

I believe this is a diſcovery of Mr. *Knowles*'s. For I think hardly any one elſe would have had Sagacity enough to have hit upon it. I muſt freely own I have not ſufficient penetration to ſee, that the Compilers of the Creed deſign'd to exclude the Argument *à priori* by this expreſſion, *maker of heaven and earth*, or that they thought or knew any thing about it, ſince the expreſſion is equally true, and equally important, whether that Argument be juſt, or not. And if they did intend to exclude it, I cannot think the Argument of at all the leſs force, unleſs it appears that they had Authority from Heaven to forbid the Uſe of it; which I believe will not be pretended.

And as for the Authority of Scripture, I think what God ſays to *Moſes*, *Exod.* iii. 14. when he aſk'd, what anſwer he ſhould give to the *Iſraelites*, if they ſhould enquire what the Name of that God was who had ſent him to them; I think the Anſwer of God upon this occaſion much more favourable to the Argument *à priori* than this Expreſ-

ſion

ſion in the Creed, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, is againſt it. *God ſaid unto Moſes*, I AM THAT I AM: *And he ſaid, Thus ſhalt thou ſay unto the children of Iſrael*, I AM *hath ſent me unto you.* The Expreſſions are particularly ſtrong; and ſeem to ſignify the abſolute Neceſſity of God's Exiſtence.

But I know no reaſon why we ſhould *diſpute* or make any *enquiries* after Truth, but juſt what is *received*, if a thing's being barely *receiv'd* is a ſufficient reaſon why we ſhould believe it; unleſs we can diſcover ſomething about which there is no *received* opinion at all. The ſhorteſt and eaſieſt way is to acquieſce in the diſcoveries and reaſonings of others; and give ourſelves no trouble about arguments and debates; and thus to live peaceably ignorant, and ſuffer others to dictate what they pleaſe to us. I know no medium between this, and examining and judging for ourſelves. Nor do I think we have a right to determine any thing, eſpecially what is, or has been the ſubject of controverſy, 'till we have ſearch'd and enquir'd into the nature of it, and have ſome reaſon of *our own*, I mean ſuch as truly convinces *us*, to give for it.

We are no way concern'd in what is out of our reach, what we have no ſort of idea or conception of. To require us to aſſent to any ſuch thing is to require a downright Impoſſibility. And therefore to require us to *ſay* we aſſent to it, is to require us to lie and diſſemble.

There are many things indeed which *we know* but *in part* *, of which we have but a very ſlight and imperfect underſtanding or notion, which yet may reaſonably appear true to us, and which therefore, upon proper evidence, we ought to believe. But where is the Piety, the Virtue, or the Wiſdom of aſſenting to words which convey no ſenſe or meaning to us; of talking religious or any other jargon and gibberiſh? And what is it leſs than this to aſſent to doctrines becauſe they are *received*, if we are no judges of the Truth of them ourſelves?

* 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

SECT.

## SECT. VIII.

### *The Relations of things are eternal and neceſſary Truths.*

MR. *Knowles* does not, I think, write clearly upon the Relations of things; which are *neceſſarily* what they are, as every one muſt know who endeavours to imagine it poſſible for a part to be equal to the whole, or for twice two to be more or leſs than four. Mr. *Knowles* would have this *neceſſity* "commence after the exiſtence of the ſubjects has begun, and then "derive its nature from theirs. The things "themſelves," ſays he, "could never have "exiſted without a divine mind, nor this "neceſſity without ſome preceding prædi-"cates; to make this *neceſſity* therefore, "which muſt needs be ſubſequent both "to the divine will, and to the things "which owe their origin to it, *antecedent* "to both of them, even when it is *no-"thing* without them, is the moſt pal-"pable ὕστερον πρότερον, that can poſſibly be "imagined *.

* P. 8.

If this be true, it was poſſible before the Creation for twice two to make more or leſs than four, and the three angles of a triangle to be more or leſs than two right angles, *&c.* And is there a perſon in the world that will aſſert any ſuch thing; or ſay that the relations of things can, or could, upon any ſuppoſition, be otherwiſe than they are? And if they could be otherwiſe, does the *neceſſity* of them *commence after the exiſtence of the ſubjects has begun, and then, derive its nature from theirs?* If ſo, there was no *neceſſity* before they begun that their relations ſhould be as they are; it was not neceſſary that they ſhould bear ſuch particular proportions to one another; and numbers, angles, and every thing elſe might have been otherwiſe propor-tion'd; ſo that twice two might have been perhaps ſixteen or ſeventeen, or, it may be, no more than one and a half, and the three angles of a triangle, equal to three, four, or five right angles, or perhaps only one, inſtead of two. I own I know not how to avoid the conſequence, or bring Mr. *Knowles*'s Aſſertion off any better. I aſſure him I would if I could. But at preſent he muſt excuſe me.

What

What I mean, when I ſay the Relations of things are *neceſſary* and *eternal*, is, that it is *neceſſarily* and *eternally* true that whenever ſuch things exiſt they ſhould bear ſuch particular Relations and Proportions one to another. For inſtance, a ſixth part cannot be equal to a fifth or a fourth part, nor a fourth or a third be equal to half. And will any one ſay theſe things may be true or falſe of a piece of timber or ſtone, *&c.* before ſuch a thing exiſts, tho' we find they cannot but be juſt as they are when there is a piece of timber or ſtone, *&c.* in Being? But this muſt be the caſe if the *neceſſity* of ſuch Relations *commences*, as Mr. *Knowles* ſays it does, *after the exiſtence of the ſubjects has begun.*

And now pray, where is *the moſt* palpable ὕστερον πρότερον of ſuppoſing the *neceſſity* of Relations *antecedent to the divine will, and to the things which owe their origin to it?* Will you ſay the *divine will* cauſes two and two to be equal to four, or produces any mathematical or other Relations of things? Are theſe arbitrary and mutable? Or do they neceſſarily follow upon ſuppoſition of the things to which they may belong?

And

And if Mr. *Knowles* is ſrighten'd with the ſuppoſition of any thing *antecedent* or *prior* to the will of God, and can underſtand theſe expreſſions in no other ſenſe than before it in point of time, let him look back upon Sect. 3 and 4.

## *The* CONCLUSION.

I Think I have ſaid enough to vindicate the Argument *à priori*; and ſhew that it is neither the abſurd nor the impious thing it is repreſented. I think, on the other hand, that as we have no rational account of the Exiſtence, nor a certain proof either of the Immenſity or the Unity of God without it, ſo we can conceive nothing ſo great of him as that he cannot but be, and is neceſſarily what he is. Otherwiſe I ſee no ſort of proof of his Immutability. Nor can I be ſure, upon any other ſuppoſition, that he will not be the very Reverſe in time to come to what he is at preſent. What ſhould hinder him from being ſo but abſolute Neceſſity? no external thing ſurely, ſince he is confeſſedly independent. You will ſay perhaps his Independency

dependency is intirely inconſiſtent with any Change or Alteration. But are you ſure of that without ſuppoſing him neceſſarily exiſting? Or can it be prov'd that he is independent without this? All other things, you will ſay, depend upon him. He muſt therefore be independent himſelf. I grant this to be a good argument. But what if it ſhould loſe all it's force if we aſſert that he exiſts *without Cauſe?* What if it ſhould be replied that he who *is* without cauſe may ceaſe to be, or undergo any alteration, or become dependent, *without cauſe?* And if God exiſts without *cauſe*, his attributes are without *cauſe* as well as his *being:* He is therefore *immutable* and *independent* without cauſe; that is, there is no reaſon why he ſhould be either. It may not perhaps be very eaſy to give a clear and plain and ſatisfactory anſwer to this. For if the greateſt thing may be, if the moſt perfect Being may exiſt, without any Cauſe or Reaſon, why may not any thing elſe happen without Cauſe or Reaſon?

I own it is very fit to uſe arguments *à poſteriori* to prove the Being and Attributes of God. And if we ſtop here, and determine

mine nothing concerning him, after we have prov'd from his works of Creation and Providence that he is the moſt perfect Being, and the Governor, as well as the Maker of the Univerſe, if I ſay, after this we ſay nothing at all about the Cauſe of his Exiſtence, we talk rationally. And this is the utmoſt I expect from the generality of learned men. But when it is aſſerted that God exiſts *without cauſe*, it is high time to clear up the point, and guard our Religion from the Objections of Atheiſts, who cannot but have great Advantage from ſuch an Aſſertion. For why may not the world exiſt *without cauſe*, as well as the Creator of it? And is not this an eaſy dernier reſort for the maintainers of any ſcheme or ſyſtem, however abſurd? May they not tell you, when they can reaſon or explain no further, that the foundation of what they are diſcourſing upon is *without cauſe?* And why has not one as good a right to ſuch an aſſertion as another?

And now, in order to ſee at one clear and ſhort View where the Truth lies, I ſhall ſet ſome of the principal aſſertions on both ſides of the preſent controverſy over againſt

againſt one another. And the Reader may chuſe juſt which he pleaſes of them.

I.

God exiſts from abſolute Neceſſity, ſo that it is an abſurdity and a contradiction to ſuppoſe him not to be.

II.

God could from all Eternity have caus'd ſomething to be. Therefore there might have been, and are, for ought we know, eternal creatures.

I.

God exiſts *without cauſe*: that is, there is no Reaſon why he ſhould exiſt.

II.

All created or *caus'd* beings muſt have a Beginning. Therefore God could not from Eternity have *caus'd* any thing to be; and there muſt have been Myriads of Ages in which he could not have exerted his own Power; in which he could, and could not have created, or caus'd ſomething to be.

III.

God is eternal and omnipresent,

III.

God is, as likewise all incorporeal Beings are, *never* and *no where*; and yet both he and they exist.

IV.

Time and Space are absolutely necessary,

IV.

Time and Space are nothing at all, but mere abstract ideas: so that there is no real distance between the Earth and the fixt Stars; and *Adam* did not live a Minute ago.

V.

The Relations of things are eternal and neceſſary Truths.

V.

The neceſſity of the Relations of things commences after the Exiſtence of the Subjects has begun. So that, before you have particular Subjects to which theſe belong, and likewiſe ſome time after, twice two may be more or leſs than four, or a quarter may be equal to half.

I conclude in the words of Dr. *Clarke*, " The Proof *à priori*, is (I fully believe) " ſtrictly *demonſtrative*; but (like numberleſs *Mathematical Demonſtrations*,) " capable of being underſtood by only a " *few attentive Minds*; becauſe 'tis of " *Uſe*, only againſt *Learned and Metaphyſical*

" *physical Difficulties.* And therefore it " must never be expected, that this should " be made obvious to the *Generality* of " Men, any more than *Astronomy* or *Ma-* " *thematicks* can be *.

* Part of a Letter publish'd at the end of Dr. *Clarke's Boyle's Lectures.*

*F I N I S.*